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ABSTRACT

The author outlines his 25-year attempt to understand the dynamics of humor. He views humor as the sine qua non of self actualization and maturity. The humorist has an adamant sense of his own significance without having to prove himself better than others or to prove his worth through some role performance. Connections with humankind--past, present, and future--are keenly felt by the humorist. Paradoxes of life must be appreciated for one to be a humorist. The humorist does not repress one pole of a paradox but keeps both extremes open to awareness. His sudden switches between perceptual poles gives the humorist his distinctive smile of "resolution." Several of these paradoxes are illustrated. The "Big Three" of psychoanalysis are brought together by the author in his theory of Humanistic Identification and its relevance for humor. Experiences using sense of humor for staff survival, eventuating in the use of humor as a mode of psychotherapy with the drug addict, are also explored. (Author/MML)

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HUMOUR FOR ACTUALIZATION AND SURVIVAL

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Chronic Undifferentiated Dyshumoria

There is no point in the struggle to survive unless we can become aware of the fundamental ecstatic component in almost every kind of activity. Nearly every "task": can be performed in the spirit of dancing, playing a guitar, or working out a game of chess...At first, the notion seems absurd, for the bus driver, like all of us, is under immense social pressure to "get there." But when you get there, "there" is "here", and if you can't live completely "here", what is the point of going "there"? (1, P. 1).

We psychologists trained around the middle of the twentieth century grew up for the most part to be mechanical academicians. Our active imaginations withered on the vine from disuse atrophy. The average psychologist of those days diagnosed patients according to descriptive nomenclature, assisted clients to adjust to "reality", and pursued pure knowledge solely through the canons of experimental design. Very few of us ever verbalized heretical questions about the ultimate validities of descriptive diagnoses, theories and techniques of therapy, and premises of research designs as the only road to truth. Our subtle but intense efforts to control patients, data, reality, and monopolize truth made us appropriate objects of humour, yet we were unable to perceive ourselves in a vitalizing humorous light. Perhaps this ego-syntonic dyshumoria partially explains our lack of impact in the real world of everyday constrictions, miseries, and joys. Decades later, my guiding fiction now is that only when we teach students of psychology the sense of their innate personal worth and inherent belonging will they be able to exist joyously within an inherently paradoxical world in which each man is the creator and creation of his own self-training, for better or for worse. My Moral: The truths of personal actualization are created within before they can be discovered and analyzed from without.

Freud's Definition

In my explorations Freud's (2) clinical examples of humour were highlighted. Here the humour producer and/or appreciator is a person

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who can, under severe objective stress, make a sudden perceptual switch from incipient painful affects to a state reflective of the triumph of the ego and the pleasure principle. It is impossible faithfully to follow Freud further since he incongruously considered humour to be the epitome of maturity as well as the pathological denial of reality. Freud's picture of the humorist as one with a benign superego added to the confusion at a time when the superego was routinely regarded as prohibitive in nature. In addition Freud's descriptive and abstract thinking on the humorist did not take account of the variables influencing life style change. Freud pictured the humorist as one who had "hypercathexis of the superego." He thereby isolated movement-oriented behavioral concepts from abstract theory.

Freud made a distinction between the active producer of humour who saw himself or others in a humorous light. The former I designated Type B, the humour of the self, the most encouragenic. Regarding others in a humorous vein was called Type A, a risky venture because the absence of an equal relationship might trigger a hostile response to intended humour (3).

Another of Freud's observations was that humour was a reaction to incipient negative (painful) affects. Successful humour circumvented and prevented these negative unpleasant states and eventuated in pleasure for the humour creators and those observers of a like psychic disposition. The precipitator of humour, whether self or other-directed, in Freud's structure and approach was the superego's perception that all is "child's play": the very thing to jest about under severe stress. Humour therefore depended upon the presence of gentle empathy and love toward oneself (Type B) and toward others (Type A), rather than the influence of an angry autocratic superego.

O'Connell's Contribution

> ...A smile is itself a sign of wisdom--so thought the Greek fathers. Indeed Origen....goes so far as to say that the truly wise man is like a child that smiles and plays by the bier of its parents...(4, P. 37).

This paper presents tentative theoretical sketches, at most distilled from clinical and research experiences. The curious reader who wants to know why I believe I became addicted to the study of humour and where this pilgrimage of over a quarter century has taken me is referred to other sources (3, 5). Since I have ruminated and researched for a quarter century upon Freud's clinical examples, I will forthwith present my own views. For the moment, man is to be imagined as a creative creature capable of infinite inner expansion through such learned (but seldom taught) reactions as a art of humour. First of all, one may "intend" wit or humour and entirely miss the mark. Or what starts to be humour may eventuate in wit, a response of feeling oneself the victim of a hostile put-down. This crucial point has been overlooked because wit and humour were approached in earlier times as if

they were encapsulated entities, rather than merely convenient constructs to identify certain processes within a framework of communications. Because wit and humour grow out of communication between dyads, intended Type A humour may end-up as anything but humour in the eyes of the dyadic Other. The extent of such interactional subtleties can be seen in the behaviour of a lady in one of my therapy groups. Whenever she relates her litany of panics and protestations, she demands that other members follow her lead with suitable verbal and nonverbal signs of reflected pain and discouragement. Eventually she reaches a point where she makes a sudden switch and regards her frustrations as humorous and experiences personal enhancement. Yet if anyone gives signs of "all-this-is-child's-play" before she does, her response is one of shock at the "hostility" of the other. Needless to say, she has not yet viewed her initiating ploys of hopeless-helplessness in a humorous light.

Intended Type B humour cannot be judged to be "humour" until after the fact. The criteria of humour is thereby centered upon a subsequent expansion of worth and significance and not upon the immediate outer smiles, laughter and tears of the participants. In other words, the reactions of wit and humour are to be judged by effects upon the constriction or expansion of self-esteem (SE) and social interest (SI) of those involved. Such criteria do not solve the measurement problems, but they do point to a fruitful direction for exploration. As an example, take the prisoner story cited by Freud. The punch-line of the lad about to be hanged on a Monday, "This is a good beginning to the week," could have been reacted to in many ways. The prisoner could have focused on discouraging irony and constricted his SE and SI, feeling worthless and isolated. He would then follow with the movements of injured worth and isolation, the opposite of encouragenic actions. True Type B humour would reflect the workings of humanistic identification of the natural high (5): encouragement (expansion of SE and SI). Likewise with observers, the same discouragenic or encouragenic atmosphere would emerge, determined by the self-created attitudes and perceptions of persons involved. One may attempt to produce an encouragenic humorous atmosphere, but message sent may not be message received. The purpose or goal of the sending and receiving persons is vital and is completely overlooked in a mechanistic theory of humour production and appreciation.

The Man for all Paradoxes

> ...The tensions between the sacred and the profane, and the taboos enforcing them, are transcended through a momentary recapture of that state in which such categories do not exist...the mystery that cannot be contained and ordered by man...(6, Pps. 213-214).

Increased energy from the reconciliation of opposites has long been a contention of Jungian psychology. The inner dialogue between

the conscious state and emerging archetypes creates the Transcendent function, a positive growth state akin to the natural high. Dynamic psychology in general would also hold that repressing energies released from ceasing to center on one pole of a paradox (e.g., masculine-feminine, good-bad) would result in a greater accumulation of conscious psychic energies.

In my case energy lacks meaning unless directionality or purpose of expression is specified. Myers (7) mentions a tremendous energy release in religious ceremonies where symbols of aloof gods and deflating humans move throughout rituals without upsetting or deflating each other. Similar energy was created and directed toward life's tasks in Death and Dying labs in which death is acted upon in the midst of life. Participants reported intense and enlivening perceptions and renewed vigor following an encouragement lab which included paradoxical death and dying exercises. The most striking example of renewed energy directed toward social interest developed in such encouragement labs in which a psychodrama of death was experienced (8). The simultaneous presentation of the dying-living paradox (or more accurately the rapid fluctuation between these polar extremes) stimulated energy growth within and between participants. Until then, I had never seen four groups of persons crying, yet paradoxically attending to other and not using emotions to create distance or gain special services. After a year, these participants still communicate with each other and wonder why this particular session was worlds apart from the usual encounter group experience.

The authentic humorist is one who leaves no pole of a paradox for long. His sudden inner paradoxical switches from pole to pole provide the inner catharsis that result in a sudden smile. Type B humour, using the "God's eye view" or the innate sense of detachment, is primarily an <u>inner</u> mechanism giving relief from attachments which might lose for the humorist the control of his inner strength, self-esteem (SE) and social interest (SI). Type A and B humour, as Freud implied, is of growth-value to the spectator only if he has empathic similarity (or social interest) with the humorist. Thomas More's humor on his gallows (3, 5), still greatly admired by much of the Western world, did nothing for the social interest of his detractors who saw only crazy self-deception in his smiling greetings to death.

Such psychoanalytic experts on humour as Grotjahn (9) connect the humorist with the mourning of external object-loss, but they are less cognizant of the switch to the other pole of the paradox, the self-containing God-within stance of Meister Eckhart, Carl Jung, or Teilhard de Chardin (10). The world is full of paradoxes and opposites which need to be reconciled within the humorist's psyche. Only a sampling of these is noted in the polemics of masculine-feminine, sacred-profane, inner-outer, past-present, youth-age, life-death, conscious-unconscious. Such extremes are consistently (albeit temporally) united in the sudden perceptual switches of the consciousness of the humorist. Three

paradoxes lightly labeled as St. Augustine's, the tragicomic, and the existential paradoxes will serve as illustrations (3).

One pole of St. Augustine's paradox is that my death does not matter; the swing to the other pole is marked by the belief that what I am now doing is of universal importance. Polemics cannot contribute to enhancement of self-esteem and universal belonging unless they are admitted and integrated in quick succession into consciousness. My death (and mini-deaths of disappointing endings) can only be tolerated in light of my faith in the evolutionary process on equal footing with all vibrant matter (10). Others will repeat what I am doing, even though human life tasks bid me to add my unique movements. Twentieth century scientism is critical of such "philosophy" as totally archaic and regressive; yet a creative-growth world view has psychological survival value in stimulating positive loving actions in the here and now.

The humorist has self-generated experience focusing upon the dual poles of the existential paradox. The negative pole, that of innate finitude--decay, dirt and death, concentrated upon for excessive periods creates depressive states of worthlessness and isolation. The opposite extreme, the God-like capacity for self-enhancing imagination and meaning, can trigger paranoia if fixated by selective "arrangement" on narcissistic isolation. These "grandiose" cognitions, untempered by reactive perceptual swings, call forth external blame on others for one's unacknowledged imperfections. To dwell at either extreme is constrictive. The skill of the humorist is to call forth both extremes in rapid succession. To Jungians, this skillful maneuver is the reconciliation of opposites; to Myers (7), it is the simultaneous evoking of a paradox; to O'Connell, who cannot imagine divergent ideation simultaneously presented in consciousness, the technique is that of a rapid perceptual swing of inner dialectics.

Acceptance of tragicomic paradox often heralds the birth of Type B humour. The budding humorist, looking at his past, unites (or re-solves) these paradoxical poles. One tragicomic extreme is that of chronic self-devaluation caused by invidious comparisons, negative nonsense, and diminished self-esteem. The other extreme is chronic demands for unconditional love from others. In a negative state, one cannot or will not esteem himself, yet often demands that others do so automatically. The psychic spark between the poles is sometimes referred to in clinical jargon as the Transcendent function, decrease in defensive negative nonsense, liberated archaic energy, or what have you. All such concepts refer to a non-rational and as yet unscientific zest for living.

The sudden cognitive-perceptual switches of the humorist are rapid vacillations between the poles of a paradox, both of which have been incorporated into the humorist's life style. Here he differs vastly from the average person who aims to totally incorporate one

pole into his ideal, although even this normal person seems to fall far short of reaching his unipolar ideal. In contrast, the humorist can see himself as strong and weak, masculine and feminine, saint and sinner, rather than identify with one pole and repress the other. Such a refusal to self-exclude any facet of the human is both cause and effect of a profound sense of social interest. Both poles of human paradoxes are admitted to consciousness in quick succession. In terms of the paradoxes mentioned previously, the temporal transformation is often from the worthless side of life (e.g., the depressive stance) to a responsible and expansive dimension. The humorist retains the capability of being either dysphoric or euphoric, for example. The change from the former to the latter is more readily noted as the hallmark of the humorist. Yet it is equally apparent that the change can proceed from the euphoric to dysphoric quality, although such moves are not seen as humorous. The quick pulsation from constricted to courageous (active social interest) is what stimulates the humorous response. The equal awareness of both poles generates the energic increase noted earlier. If humour-oriented research can show a valid increase in psychic energy, deployed along the channels of SE and SI, the most outstanding human energy shortage will be solved--with a smile of welfare rather than another explosion of warfare.

A Humorist's Creed: The Alchemy of the Ultimate Game

> ...The God of creation, whose work we are permitted to call a game...both full of meaning and yet bound by no dictate of necessity.. This tremendous outpouring, a happening in which the human mingles with the divine, has been called by me a game--and in this I have followed some of the most illustrious of Christian mystics--because there is...nothing here of compulsion or calculation...(4, P. 46).

Humour is the utmost delicate movement of the whole body in the game-of-games (11). Such serious play is the pastime and vocation of the constantly actualizing human being. The main reason for Being is the expansion of self-esteem and social interest, called at times humanistic identification or the natural high (12). The humorist knows that persons, in their own creativity, can continuously constrict self-knowledge and growth experiences in a "three-ring circus" of life simultaneously. The three-rings of the Existential Circus are the inner-(I), inter-(II), and transpersonal (III) dimensions. (3, 5). Constriction fulminates with invidious comparisons and isolation which are in the service of the Hell of inadequate identification, learned early and readily in life. Constricting "mortal sins" decrease a person's worth and belonging on all three levels. Feelings of worth and significance are entirely under the control of the humorist, simply because he accepts the premise that SE and SI are the only two variables he can completely control in life.

Level I, the Inner, is a pure morass of demanding and blaming, accompanying the constriction of SE and SI. Knowledge of the inner

workings of constriction represents an initial development of the humorous self-attitude. The humorist must be able to notice incipient demands for perfection and circumvent symptoms of constriction with a devastating smile, before he is transformed into a static entity of mechanical normal adjustment, marked by petty peeves and petulances.

The humorist accepts his connectedness to others--and to the whole wiggling expanding Universe (10). At Level II, he practices the overt steps of Encouragement (5) in hopes that others may come to know how to move away from constrictive discouragement, and realize their dormant God-like powers of expansive creativity. Active and passive competition and hyperdependency can utterly destroy encouragenic feedback, so the humorist alerts his fellows to give him immediate feedback when they note the weeds of self-discouragement choking his fruits of interpersonal joy. The humorist never underestimates the process of discouragement as manifested in the useless goals of life of others. Much feedback from others may be inspired by their needs for special service, power struggles, revenge and displays of disabilities. The humorist, to remain so, must ask for and listen to feedback about his behaviours, but never abdicates his responsibility for personal change. In the universe of the humorist, all contribute; all are responsible; no one is to blame.

Level III, each person's search for his loving God, is an embarrassment to institutionalized religion and traditional science, both of whom prescribe their rituals and trappings for discerning reliable truths. The humorist, never unaware of the "holiness" of SE and SI, is likewise alerted to the ephemeral and contingent basis of external sources of worth (12). To base one's esteem upon influence (or power) from others is to sabotage one's true strength. Esteem given today can be summarily withdrawn tomorrow. Only Gods securely anchored <u>within</u> and giving purpose to life by needing human hands to carry out <u>evolutionary</u> goals can be accepted by the real humorist.

The "normal" human often turns to drugs and violence to assuage his hurt when constricted persons and goals fail to guarantee instant and constant ecstasy. The road of the humorist, the true pilgrim, is toward developing the joyous delusion that he has rediscovered the lost euphorias of childhood with the certainty that no matter what inanities the rational post-reformation world may visit upon him, he has access to the source of innate worth and inherent belonging. In the words of Hesse (13), "In their old age, some men have the gift of once again experiencing the paradisiacal state of their childhood." (P. 19). He may never be discouraged unless he chooses to be. The humorist then transforms paradoxes into energy--re-solving and re-solving--and centres the vibrations into movements of innate worth and inherent belonging. Not because he so chooses, the humorist will always be an elite element of life. Given the choice of euphoric optimism or dysphoric pessimism--both beyond ultimate proof--the bulk of mankind will favour the latter. Institutions of religion and learning seem to

require an inert, apathetic humanoid base upon which to build unwittingly their edifices for degradation of the human spirit--and thereby to bury humour forever. This is why the humorist, the ultimate athlete of the game-of-games, is his own coach, referee and audience (11).

The art of humour--total and flexible concern with both poles of a paradox--provides the person with the rewarding experience of "flow", the total awareness and heightened involvement with activity, basic to fun (14). The true humorist views life as an evolutionary game in which there is no necessity or compulsion to play. He can play at whatever tempo he cares to function: without blame, demands, or competition. These sacred ploys leads to a flowing expansion of SE and SI, and therefore are intrinsically rewarding. Paradoxically the humorist is also skilled at constricting his humanistic identification and can so move if he wants to avoid-dance on the useless side of life. Knowing one can play as well as he desires is a rule of the ultimate game of life. As he realizes that the non-compulsive sport is rewarding for himself and mankind, the humorist creates and experiences "flow." Now add to this happy scheme a Teilhardian directionality: the energy of the Universe is increased through loving actions (in meditation and interpersonal movements) and we have a universal dance with a perennially happy beat. Natural highs, "flows", humour, humanistic identification--all in all--symbolize inner state of the merry-grave man (4) who glides with every paradox in a finite world which all too often uses its will power in the service of unhappiness. Conversely, creativity in the expansion of SE and SI, the energy potential inherent in the acceptance of a paradoxically playful seriousness, is the playground for the serious game of games.

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